

Duke coach in talks with Lakers ■ 1C



Olympic trials

Track, swim meets' contrast of emotions ■ 1C

By Robert Hanashiro, USA TODAY

Marion Jones: Gold medal runner denies use of performance drugs.

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'NASCAR Drivers: 360'

"You know what else has made me follow (NASCAR) more?" asks Misha Kelly, 32, from Annapolis, Md. "That reality show, *NASCAR Drivers: 360*. I love it!"

NASCAR Drivers: 360 (FX, 10 p.m. ET Friday) is finding an audience with female fans. The show premiered May 14 and was replayed three times that weekend, receiving a strong 3.8 cumulative rating, pulling in 4.8 million viewers. The ratings have remained steady since the show's launch.

Eight episodes focus on a rotating cast of drivers and their families on and off the track. Women at the Nextel Cup race in Dover say they were tuning in because it showed the human side of the drivers.

Shana Mayfield, 27, and her husband, Jeremy, driver of the No. 19 Dodge Dealers/UAW Dodge, are featured with their three dogs. She says fans can relate to them because "we love our dogs, we sleep late and we don't eat right."

"Jeremy's fan base will grow tremendously once they see that he's not only a great race car driver but also a great family man," she says.

This is one of many efforts to drive NASCAR into popular culture and expose it to a new audience. Says NASCAR's VanDerSnick: "You'll see us reaching into the entertainment realm strongly. *NASCAR 3D: The IMAX Experience* is setting box office records everywhere for IMAX. *NASCAR Drivers: 360* is not the last entertainment program you'll see on television."

But Northwestern's Calkins sees a risk of changing too much, too soon, alienating core fans. "With any brand, you can only grow it so far until you begin to break what it is about. But so far NASCAR has been really successful at it."

Agnes Atwater, 55, from Warrenton, Va., would agree. Five hours into an 18-hour-day at Richmond, she says, "This is my favorite thing in the whole world. To me, this is what I look forward to. This is what I work for."